



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – March 2015

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement and Demonstration Project

- Construction is complete on the Dry Creek Demonstration Project, and the habitat enhancement projects withstood flows above 6,000 cfs resulting from the December 8 atmospheric river. Over the coming months, Water Agency crews are revegetating the disturbed areas of the project site with thousands of native trees, shrubs and grasses.
- Site identification, outreach to landowners, preliminary environmental studies and topographic surveys are underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA PWA, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Ten-percent designs have been completed and presented to the property owners for feedback. The 30% designs were submitted by consultants in mid-February and are being reviewed by Water Agency staff.
- The Water Agency released an RFQ in late December for design of miles four through six of habitat enhancement. Seven firms submitted Statements of Qualifications, which were scored and ranked by a selection team of Water Agency Staff. Interviews with the four most qualified firms are currently being scheduled for early April.

Fish Monitoring

It has been a challenging season to count the migrating adult salmon and steelhead. With the inflatable dam down during the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project construction, adult fish were monitored in Dry Creek and at the Healdsburg Dam fish ladder using video and sonar technology. With the river mouth closed for most of October and November, returns were low, although several fish were counted following the November 17 estuary breaching. The Healdsburg camera and the sonar technology were removed before the December 8 storm, and turbid water quality has made it difficult to identify fish videoed at the Dry Creek location. The count to January 16 from Dry Creek and Healdsburg is more than 2,600 adult salmon and steelhead.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Construction of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project illustrates the challenges of working in a river. Construction stalled in early December, when a portion of the coffer dam surrounding the site failed. The contractor repaired the cofferdam, dewatered the site, and resumed work which was then delayed in February due to storms. Construction is underway once again.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2014 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. Between September 18, when the river mouth closed, and November 26, the mouth was open for only four days, when it was breached by the Water Agency. It closed briefly in January and February, but both closures resulted in self-breaching.

- Monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing.
- Field investigations of the jetty are largely complete. In 2014, monitoring wells were installed and other tests were conducted. The purpose of the studies is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation.
- A training for volunteer pinniped monitors by the Water Agency and Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods was held on February 24.

Fish Flow Project

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released Summer 2015.

Interim Flow Changes

On August 25, the State Water Resources Control Board issued a new order, allowing minimum flows to be reduced to 50 cfs in the upper river and 60 cfs in the lower river. The Water Agency and the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District requested these changes to preserve water in Lake Mendocino for water supply and for the fall Chinook run. Due to the drought, this was the third TUC issued since December 2013. The TUCP expired on February 20 and minimum flows have returned to normal conditions, although the Water Agency is closely monitoring releases in order to preserve as much water as possible in Lake Mendocino.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- Several WAC/TAC members participated in tours of the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement projects on February 5th and 20th.
- Planning is underway for the annual spring/summer community meetings regarding the estuary and Dry Creek.



WAC & TAC members view Dry Creek Habitat, February 5, 2015